

## ADDRESS

By Walter Cronkite

Spring Commencement, The Ohio State University  
June 7, 1968

President Fawcett, faculty, graduates, parents, friends:

There are a lot of things wrong with this world we've made.

We can scarcely stand here in the shadow of the tragedy that has overwhelmed us, without acknowledging that there is a great deal wrong.

Violence and the most cowardly of crimes -- assassination -- are high on the list.

But the list is so long of real or alleged wrongs:

Poverty, ugliness, corruption, intolerance, waste of our resources, pollution of our air and water, urban sprawl, inefficient transportation, outmoded concepts of national sovereignty, the "secret society of the establishment elite," the power of the military-industrial complex, the atomic arms race, the population explosion, war.

The mere fact that the species has survived so far seems hardly adequate cause for self-applause, nor can we indulge in self-congratulations for our civilization's considerable material and cultural development that has failed to guarantee survival or nurture the bodies and the spirit of all humankind.

If we are to survive and wipe out not only the symptoms but the causes of injustice and decay, there must be change.

There is going to be change. This is inevitable. The question that the future asks is: What kind of change -- for the good or the bad, coming rapidly or more slowly, by radical excisement of the old, by amputation and transplant...or by mutation.

Some of our institutions have served us well; others have served us less than adequately, because we have served them poorly.

(MORE)

We can believe that we can improve our use of them, and thus, bring about a more perfect society. Or, we can believe that we must replace them with something new.

One of these forms of change is, of course, evolution. The other is revolution, which may or may not be accompanied by violence.

The magnificence of the American system is that it provides for either or both revolution and evolution within its existing framework without the need for violent overthrow of the system itself.

Indeed, violence not only thwarts the workings of the system but also impedes and distorts the revolution itself.

Furthermore, by transgressing the rights of the majority, violence is a denial of the very civil rights the revolutionists claim for themselves.

It is intellectually intolerable that they should attempt to hide under the cloak of the very law, the very system that they seek to destroy.

If the violence in our world today is a symptom of the illness against which the intellectual revolts, then consistency demands that he eschew violence in pursuing that revolt.

Non-violent revolt is possible, and, indeed, may be desirable. John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr. were non-violent revolutionaries.

Both preached change, within the system, within the philosophy, within the dream. Their revolutions were to be in men's minds; their weapons, understanding... reason...sustained pressure to achieve their goals.

Their strategy was to conquer totally, yet bloodlessly; to win over the mind, and the heart. They hoped their revolutions would succeed quickly...but they knew they wouldn't. So they compromised, reluctantly but realistically...concentrating their revolutionary zeal on an effort to bring about evolutionary change.

They knew, as another revolutionist, Thomas Lawrence -- the Lawrence of Arabia -- put it: "Progress is not made by the single genius, but by the common people. The genius raids, but the common people occupy and possess."

These men -- the President who wanted to lead his nation into a new age; the civil-rights leader who wanted his nation to come of age; and the daring adventurer in seemingly another age -- all saw that their revolutions needed pragmatism as well as idealism to succeed.

(MORE)



Today -- this year, this month -- an entirely different kind of revolution is underway; a student uprising, which flickers through much of East and West Europe...and flares on campuses across our own nation.

On both sides of the Iron Curtain they revolt against the establishment.

For youth's discontent stems from the same impatience that has motivated each generation when it was young -- impatience to get on with the obvious reforms that the Establishment -- of whatever era -- seems reluctant to institute.

With the world's present potential for mass suicide with nuclear weapons and the apparent inability of the Establishment to control it, is there any wonder that the students of today rebel with an urgency unknown to earlier generations.

The Vietnam war goes on, human beings at the grim game of slaughter, while the diplomats plow their ponderous way in Paris. After a few thousand years of so-called civilization, it seems that there ought to be a better way. That, I suggest, is part of what the students are saying -- there ought to be a better way.

But the parallel between the rebels here and abroad is inexact because the United States possesses to a unique degree the twin assets of democracy; the acceptance of dissent and the assurance of responsive, and, so far, responsible change.

It is against these two elements that we must weigh today's student rebellion in this country.

When does dissent, for instance, go beyond the bounds of reasonable criticism and become a danger to the survival of the society that nurtured it. And if it does go that far, what should society do about it.

Our Constitution guarantees freedom of speech, under the First Amendment. The courts, and many agree, that this freedom is not unlimited....even if the Constitution says it is. "The abuses of freedom of speech," as Benjamin Franklin noted, "ought to be repressed."

"But," he asked, "to whom are we to commit the power of doing it." His question remains unanswered today, after almost 200 years.

But if dissent applies to acts of conscience, as most of us seem to think it does, should society allow unlimited civil, or even criminal disobedience? If

(MORE)



initial dissent does not produce a responsive change, say, in the conduct of a war...should we, as citizens, be entitled then to sabotage the war-effort?

Supreme Court Justice Abe Fortas -- speaking outside the court -- feels strongly that "civil disobedience is never justified in our nation when the law being violated is not itself the target of the protest." Furthermore, as Fortas and others have argued, as long as the government Constitutionally protects the right to criticize, outright rebellion and wanton destruction can never be construed as legitimate dissent.

The dissident student leadership argues that democracy does not exist for them at their universities; that their rebellion must be total, aimed at completely paralyzing and overturning the existing leadership.

They do not realize, or they choose to ignore, just how much freedom they possess today in the United States... which despite some abuse still compares favorably with that enjoyed by any other students in any other country, at this, or any other, time in history.

Furthermore, as Dr. Sidney Hook, of New York University's Department of Philosophy, points out: academic freedom is not, as many think, freedom of the students to learn what they please; it's freedom of the universities to decide what to teach, and how to teach it. This is the academic freedom that universities have been sheltering for so many centuries....freedom from outside pressures, not freedom for inside pressure groups.

The freedom for which we all should be fighting is the freedom of free inquiry, the freedom to study our democratic institutions without fear of harrassment by misguided patriots, the freedom to advocate change without facing trial for heresy.

To determine what we keep, what we change, and what we discard, we must pursue full and open inquiry, which may require throwing off old concepts and shibboleths in the spirit of basic research...for in political action research must proceed advocacy.

In doing so we should recognize that suggested solutions will come from both the classic right and left of the political-economic spectrum, and there will be radical suggestions from both.

Because it is customary to consider radicalism only on the left, let us look, dispassionately, at a radical question from the right.

(MORE)



It concerns the comparative rights of the majority and a minority. Worthy albeit minority groups -- the colored, the impoverished, the dissident students -- have chosen as their tools for change civil disobedience and, on occasion, violence and have interfered with the normal commerce of the majority.

The more complex a society, the greater the power of a smaller minority for disruption of that society.

Which has led to the question, seriously asked by serious scholars, as to whether it is possible that in the crowded conditions of the 20th century, man's civil liberties are going to have to be curtailed for the greater good of the greater number?

Is it possible that freedom of individual action permissible when this nation was young and underpopulated, no longer can be permitted as we enter middle-age and over-population?

These are radical, shocking thoughts but listen to some others: Some day, and the dawn of that day cannot long be held back, we must take a new look at the doctrine of national sovereignty -- not because we believe any less in the principle on which the doctrine was conceived, but because we realize that the nature of our world is changing. The possession of ever more fearful means of warfare will no long permit the nations to live in anarchy, and yet any system of world order will require a surrender of some national freedom for the greater good of all.

On the federal level, the whole question of states rights may need re-examination.

Our fiscal policy is in a shambles, partly because of unnecessary duplication of government. Taxes are duplicated and, what is worse, hidden in an attempt to deceive the people. Efficiency of government is impaired and the machinery overwhelmed by proliferation of government agencies, on both the federal and local levels.

Nor is this tendency restricted to government. Big business itself sometimes becomes burdensomely top-heavy as it expands, and the people pay a tax for inefficiency in the form of higher prices.

If reform takes top-to-bottom re-structuring of the American system, then we should not be afraid of such re-building. That which is sacred in our past does not require lip-service to obsolescence.

A very keen observer of the scientific scene and a philosopher, Lord Ritchie Calder, notes that scientific revolution is the "replacement of one set of propositions

(MORE)

that have served practitioners satisfactorily (even in spite of anomalies) with a new set." A set of propositions, called a paradigm, provides model problems and solutions, the framework in which science works. He notes that to reject a paradigm -- to foment scientific revolution -- is to commit a "breach of accepted scientific tradition."

Yet the great scientific discoverers have been revolutionaries. They have rejected an important paradigm of their discipline.

In political thought, in the discipline of the political sciences, we must be willing to escape our paradigm, we must listen to those who would escape -- we must hear out the dissenters.

We must seek out, and make use of, the original thinkers.

We are now in a scientific revolution. In the life span of the youngest member of this audience we have sped through three eras -- the atomic age, the computer age, the space age, -- and now we stand on the threshold of the most revolutionary of them all, the DNA age -- the unlocking of the very secret of life, of what makes us what we are. We soon will have the frightening knowledge of how to make man any way we want him -- smart or stupid, tall or short, black or white.

In the next thirty years the transplant of human organs will be commonplace, the birthrate will be controlled, we will be exploring and perhaps colonizing the ocean floor.

Can anyone deny that a political revolution will accompany that scientific revolution? We have the future in our power. The 21st century will not burst upon us in full flower. We can mold it to be what man wants it to be.

But to do that we must know what we want, and we must examine each of our institutions to determine whether they stand up to the challenges of the century ahead.

We of my generation may have to look no further than our own failure to plan for this future, to find the seeds of youth's -- of your -- discontent.

Convinced that we are not doing the job, many of you are turning your backs on us.

(MORE)



And lest you reject that which is good of our institutions and that accumulated wisdom which we possess solely by reason of age, we must not reject those among you who dissent. In youth's rebellion against an unsatisfactory status quo we must assist, not resist.

Society is going to change. The only question is whether you who now join us in the outside world are going to help, and, indeed, if we are going to help.

Not short of death can we avoid being a part of the human parade. The question is: where will we be in it? Up toward the front, carrying the banner? Swept along somewhere in the middle? Or perhaps trampled underfoot as it marches over us en route to the future?

Our help is needed. While our way of life will change, we need to communicate by word and deed to those coming behind us the values we know are constants -- right or wrong, truth or falsehood, generosity or selfishness, dedication or cynicism, self-discipline or license.

The ferment abroad today in the land borders on anarchy, and there are frightened calls for law and order.

But as surely as a boiling kettle will not stop generating steam just because a lid is clamped on it, our ferment cannot be suppressed by tanks and guns.

Far better than suppressing ferment, how about handling it the American way -- how about channelling it toward a betterment and modernization of this society for the good of all? Why not use that steam to turn the lathes on which we can burnish away our self-doubts, polish our patriotism to a new brilliance and fashion a new American spirit.

But to do that we must listen to the dissenters. And we must begin now. There is no time to lose.

Only by opening our eyes and ears, our hearts and our minds, can we arrest the trend toward turmoil, doubt, suspicion, frustration -- but arrest it we must before a whole generation swept up by it, is asked by inevitable mortality to assume the mantle of leadership.

We are told that hippy children hate their parents because they have been given too much, because we have denied them the joys of struggle and so have denied them the sweetest fruit of all -- the taste of victory.

If this is our sin it should be viewed with compassion. We can be forgiven for failing to understand that we should pretend poverty to assure the right conditions of growth for our off-spring. The sin is inherent in an affluent society.

But there is a solution which takes advantage of our material wealth. With this wealth and our technological advances we can free the new generation from



the hours of toil once required merely to assure minimum sustenance.

For manual work we must substitute education -- education, not just training that turns out cogs for the industrial machine. Education which would prepare youth to meet the challenges of their time, the challenge to all humankind.

We would make it possible for all men, freed from daily drudgery, to think, and to give public service.

We could inspire them to study the problems, to seek solutions, to give of their new-found time freely and gladly. Why, we might even earn their gratitude for giving them this guidance to the task ahead and for creating the environment that would bring forth a new nation to meet 21st century problems with the same vigor, imagination and constructive use of dissent that it possessed in its infancy two centuries ago.

Why were the men who founded this nation and whose foresight we praise to this day so omniscient. Because they were the educated men of their day, born and trained to public service. Yet in the economy of two centuries ago, they were a small class. What wonders we might accomplish in shaping the next century if a whole nation were educated, born and trained to public service? A nation of Jeffersons and Randolphs and Madisons and Franklins and Hamiltons and Paines -- is that really so wild a dream?

At 22, Thomas Jefferson stood outside the Virginia House of Burgesses and listened to Patrick Henry and, as Jefferson later wrote, he was inspired to read and ponder.

Presently youth is listening outside our doors but is it being inspired to ponder? Are we inspiring youth to turn off and turn away, or to come in and join the discussion of their future -- and ours.

Carl Bridenbaugh in his excellent book, "Seat of Empire", noted of the patriots who first met in Virginia's Williamsburg: "Their equality and status questioned, even threatened, the now united gentry became radicals, gentlemen revolutionists. They revolted to preserve what they had."

May I suggest that to preserve what we have we must lead, or at least join, the revolution against that which is evil in our society. Let our new gentry -- the gentry of the educated and the wise -- become radicals and seek bold new solutions to our problems.

Indeed, to refuse to recognize the need for revolution

(MORE)



is the ultimate denial of the principles for which our forefathers risked so much, offering even to lay down their lives.

Ladies and gentlemen, history beckons, ready to bestow its accolade on those who turn today's dissent to tomorrow's victory.

This country has not lost its ability to respond to challenge, and while the challenges of today seem frightening in their complexity, there is no reason for despair. The more and the greater the challenges, the greater the heroism of thought, deed and courage to surmount them -- and the more exciting the prospect of the combat and the sweeter the taste of victory.